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SUBJECT: SUCCESSFUL NDU DEMOCRATIC SECURITY SEMINAR

¶1. SUMMARY: With Embassy support, the National Defense University's Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies (CHDS) presented a weekend seminar on methodologies for developing a national-level democratic security strategy to top officials of the Arias Administration on July 28-31, 2006. The seminar was funded by U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) and was designed to assist Costa Rican authorities with refining security objectives, balancing those objectives against limited resources and establishing effective measures of progress. As an additional benefit, extensive contact with SOUTHCOM personnel enhanced understanding on the part of new Costa Rican officials of the U.S. military's positive involvement in regional security. The seminar not only opened a national security dialogue among GOCR officials who do not normally work together, but in the case of Public Security Minister Berrocal (point man on security issues), seemed to lessen the Tico allergy to things "military". These are both positive developments. END SUMMARY.

¶2. High-ranking participants included Vice President Laura Chinchilla, Minister of Presidency Rodrigo Arias, Minister of Public Security Fernando Berrocal, and Attorney General Francisco Dall'Anese. Participation was active and constructive. Opportunities for informal contact abounded and many participants commented that, outside of a national crisis, it would be nearly impossible to get such a diverse group of Costa Rican officials working together on a multi-day, national-level project. Participants also frequently commented on the usefulness of the methodology presented by the CHDS facilitators. On the final day, working groups provided presentations of their results and findings to Rodrigo Arias, who is also brother and closest advisor to President Oscar Arias.

¶3. In the wake of the seminar, we have received numerous requests for copies of presentations by the working groups and by the facilitators. For example, Police Director Alpizar told us he needed the information as part of a planning document the Minister of Public Security has been tasked to develop for President Arias. This is a direct result of the seminar. In another case, Vice Minister of Justice Ferraro requested specific presentations in order to refine a planning document for the Costa Rican prison system.

COMMENT

¶4. Aside from the progress made in advancing Costa Rica's strategic thinking in the area of democratic security, the seminar produced a number of concrete benefits in terms of relationship building. Perhaps most important was the opportunity Minister Berrocal had to engage with SOUTHCOM personnel. One result was progress made toward Costa Rican participation in the State Partnership program. Another result was a more nuanced understanding of SOUTHCOM and the U.S. military's role in regional security. Minister Berrocal

is now so inclined to work with SOUTHCOM that he intends to reduce the amount of time he spends in Washington during a planned October visit in order to allow more time to visit SOUTHCOM HQ in Miami. We view the speed with which the Minister seemed to shed the typical Costa Rican "allergic reaction" to all things military as a very positive sign for the new government. Our follow up will be essential, however, to keep up the momentum.

FRISBIE